The AMERICAN SCHOLAR

MYTHOLOGY: The New Cults of the Goddess

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Source: *The American Scholar*, Spring 1993, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 261-268

Published by: The Phi Beta Kappa Society

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.com/stable/41212103

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The New Cults of the Goddess

MARY R. LEFKOWITZ

In the early fifth century B.C., Xenophanes of Colophon observed that human beings tended to create gods in their own image. He complained that Homer and Hesiod made the gods in their epics behave as disgracefully as human beings, stealing, committing adultery, deceiving one another. "Mortals think that gods are born, and that they wear human clothes and speak and look like humans"; "Ethiopians think their gods have flat noses and black skin and Thracians say they have green eyes and red hair"; "If oxen had hands, or horses or lions, and they could draw with their hands and finish works like men, the horses would draw images of gods like horses, and oxen like oxen and make them have the same bodies as they had themselves."

The last three of these quotations are preserved by the Church father Clement of Alexandria, as an indictment of anthropomorphic paganism, and they are often cited as evidence that the Greeks themselves were aware of the limitations of their own religion. But primarily Xenophanes deserves to be quoted because his observation is, in a general way, true of *all* religions: humans create gods in their own image, depending upon their needs and what aspects of themselves they judge to be important at the time. Thus, Freud in his studies of the human mind describes the Judeo-Christian god as a wish fulfillment of the unconscious, a father figure, and religion itself as regression to a primitive stage of ego development. In its place he offered a new religion centered in the study of the human mind, with a new mythology that explained why the powers and terrors previously regarded as external were in fact internal mental processes.

Given this general human tendency, it is not at all surprising that once modern women began to perceive themselves as a class or genre with interests, needs, and styles of life distinctly separate from that of other human beings, they would begin to develop divinities of their own, noticeably different both in gender and character from the deities described in the writings of the Hebrew Patriarchs, the Church fathers, and Sigmund Freud. Although in recent years there has been evidence of increased awareness of the desirability of a religion in which a female divinity is the central figure, and new interest in the remote past in which such a deity or deities may have been predominant, new interest in the role of goddesses was manifested a century ago, in the earliest days of the women's movement.

In 1879, in the ritual that accompanied the first Tree Day at Wellesley College, the young women students imagined that they were praying to the hamadryad, or tree nymph, of their Class Tree and seeking her protection:

> Oh nymph divine,
> We're thine, we're thine.
> Thy beauty is our chosen shrine.
> We'll dare, we'll dare
> Thy fate to share,
> Oh chosen nymph
> With golden hair.

Since the Founders intended that Wellesley women become (Protestant) Christian missionaries, we know that the writer of this song and her contemporaries were not encouraged

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to believe in any literal way in wood nymphs or hamadryads. But, at the same time, it is significant that they drew on classical rather than Christian mythology to express the relationship of their class to their class tree. Christian mythology, of course, was of no use to them, because it has no goddesses (with perhaps one exception), or at any rate no goddesses connected with trees.

The Tree Day song, quaint as it now seems, is in fact an embryonic feminist ritual, in which the tree represents the young and independent Wellesley female. Like Daphne in the ancient Greek myth, who resisted the amorous advances of the god Apollo, the tree and her nymph remain on campus, fixed in one place, for a lifetime or longer. The myth offers an opportunity for self-expression and independence, at least in the form of a tree. Hence the enthusiasm of the first Wellesley students for Tree Day and the rich, unapproachable beauty of the Nymph of the Golden Evergreen in the song.

But unfortunately the model of Daphne represents only one—and a limited—side of female experience. Suppose a woman leaves the campus after she graduates, gets married, and has children. Who in Greek mythology is she supposed to emulate then? Women who did not resist the advances of the gods, such as Io (who was turned into a cow), Danae (who was put to sea in a box with her infant son), Leda (whose daughter Helen was born from an egg because in her case Zeus had taken the form of a swan)? Titian painted Danae enjoying Zeus's attentions in the form of a shower of gold, but I do not find it at all remarkable that women writers, although eager to write poems praising wood nymphs, do not apostrophize the joys of cowhood, being raped by a swan, or voyaging across the Aegean in a box with one's infant son.

Christian mythology and legend likewise offer limited possibilities for women before motherhood. There is martyrdom (after torture) and extreme asceticism; after motherhood, devotion to the family and mourning for the dead. Despite the limitations of these religious traditions, it was inevitable that today's women would need to develop a new mythology of their own and that they would turn to paganism for models, though not exclusively to Greco-Roman paganism, as attractive as taking the form of a cow might seem in comparison with being gored by a wild cow (as was St. Perpetua). But—perhaps inevitably also—the goddess modern women have chosen represents themselves more accurately than she represents any goddess or goddesses in the past.

Unlike the goddesses in the other religions we are familiar with, the New Goddess is worshiped primarily by women. Her cult has no designated places of worship or ordained clergy or official iconography. Rather, the Goddess is believed to reside in all females and can thus be present in any individual or any gathering of women. She is the central cult figure of the New Witchcraft and plays an increasingly important role in feminist theology. Recent books describe specific rituals that emphasize female experiences such as mothering, nurturing, and touching; they stress togetherness and expression of feeling; men are not excluded from these rites, but they are regarded as secondary, and, if necessary, are employed as sex objects.

Many new books assure us that the present-day cults of the Goddess derive from long-suppressed ancient cults and that, accordingly, her worship represents the original and most natural form of human religion, although it was replaced in historical times by patriarchal religions. The process, it is suggested, can be well illustrated in Greek mythology: there Earth was the first divinity of all (except for the rather indefinable Emptiness (Chaos) from which she was born; but Earth then gave birth to a male god Heaven, who then became not only her husband but her master. In the myths, many gods and goddesses are born to Earth and Heaven and to their children, but however numerous and powerful the goddesses, the god who is in charge always remains male—first Heaven, then his son Cronos, and finally Zeus.

Present-day Goddess religion seeks to return to the earliest phase of the divine cosmogony, the primacy of the goddess Earth. Although goddesses from other cultures are studied, writers in English have tended to concentrate on the mythologies they are most familiar with—the biblical and the Greek: the Hebrew Eve in her garden paradise, the Greek Gaia (Ge or Earth), and, since there are so few myths about Gaia, her granddaughter, Demeter, because her name has been thought (although how accurately is another question)

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to mean Earth-Mother. The other goddesses from the Greek and other pantheons are understood primarily as aspects, or partial representations, of the first "original" Goddess.

The Goddess's history, however reconstructed, follows the basic outline of the myth: she was there first, and then male gods replaced her, establishing their dominance by rape as well as by such weapons as lightning and thunder. The male gods and their worshipers drove Goddess religion underground and emphasized the most destructive aspects of her character—for example, only the war goddess Athena or the huntress Artemis are usually cited, and the process has been compared to Hitler's Holocaust. Worship of the Goddess's life-giving aspects has survived, though primarily in women's worship, as in the many dedications by women suffering from female medical disorders to Artemis as Birth-Goddess. Other positive aspects of the Goddess's cult were preserved by uneducated women in the rituals of witchcraft and in European folktales.

Abundant archaeological data can be produced to show the importance of females in prehistoric times: statuettes of female figures, often with exaggerated breasts or bellies; beautifully crafted statues of bare-breasted goddesses from Minoan Crete, with snakes in their hands; empty shrines with circular, womb-like buildings that might easily be thought to represent female fertility, and representations of animals connected with human sexuality, such as bulls, bees, or butterflies. These examples, when combined, can be understood to show the importance in Goddess cults of the natural world. According to Marija Gimbutas, in her recent book *The Language of the Goddess,* "this culture took keen delight in the natural wonders of this world. Its people did not produce lethal weapons or build forts in inaccessible places.... Instead they built magnificent tomb-shrines and temples, comfortable houses in moderately-sized villages, and created superb pottery and sculptures. This was a long-lasting period of remarkable creativity and stability, an age free of strife."

If this vision of the past begins to sound more utopian than realistic, there is a good reason. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the worshipers of the Goddess are following a familiar mythological pattern. Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden; Greek poets also told of a Golden Age when human beings lived in harmony with nature. Hesiod in *Works and Days* writes:

> The life-giving land of its own accord brought forth a large and abundant harvest, and the people lived off their fields at their ease and in peace in good cities.

Is a natural world of the Goddess more likely to be factual than the Golden Age or the Garden of Eden? Probably not, because like the others, it is based on belief rather than fact, and also like the others, it is more likely to be informative about the present than any time in the past. Hesiod, the Greek poet who first describes the Golden Age, also complains bitterly about the time in which he lived: "For now is truly the age of iron, and neither by day or by night will humankind cease being vexed by pain and woe."

It is particularly tempting to try to imagine what the *prehistoric* past was like, since we know so little about it, and interpretation is required to make any coherent sense out of the artifacts that have survived. Archaeological data can be produced, but, without any context other than their archaeological provenances, it is not always easy to know what to make of them. Or, to put it another way, if we are not told what an object is by some external source, such as a label or an inscription, an eyewitness or other documentary text, we can only know what it is by analogy to something with which we are familiar. If many statues of females with swollen bellies are found at shrines in the Aegean Islands from the second millennium B.C.E, it is reasonable to assume that female fertility was respected. What is more difficult to know is whether the statues represent goddesses or women. Similarly with ritual; in the absence of written reports, we might know who stood where and did what but not what they thought or felt about what they were doing.

In their attempts to imagine what ancient ritual and religion was like, students of the past have tended to find what they were looking for. When the eighteenth-century English antiquarian William Stukeley investigated the great stones in Avebury, he believed he had found evidence in pre-Christian Druidic religion from "a picture of the Deity,

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more particularly of the Trinity." Relying on the same archaeological information (or even less, because since the eighteenth century, stones have been moved or simply taken away), Elinor Gadon, in her recent book, *The Once and Future Goddess*, suggests that the Avebury site was used for elaborate puberty rituals and harvest festivals celebrating the Goddess's pregnancy and fertility.

The same emphasis on female sexuality may be found in *The Spiral Dance*, a recent book of instructions for the celebration of the Goddess at Halloween. Even though the ritual she describes may have historic antecedents, the present version places a distinctive emphasis on sexual definition and development. According to the book's author, Starhawk (one of the most influential proponents of the new cult), Halloween is a festival of life and death, the fall harvest and the planting of the dead seed that is the beginning of the new crop. Coveners are asked to gather in a circle, while the high priestess explains:

> This is the night when the veil is thin that divides the worlds. It is the New Year in the time of the year's death, when the harvest is gathered and the fields lie fallow. For tonight the King of the Waning Year has sailed over the sunless sea that is the womb of the Mother, and steps ashore on the shining Isle, the luminous world egg, becoming the seed of his own rebirth. The gates of life and death are opened, the sun child is conceived; the dead walk, and to the living is revealed the Mystery that in every ending is but a beginning.

Here, as in Gimbutas's account of life before patriarchal religion, we can recognize the influence of Greek mythology—for example, in the idea central to the Eleusinian Mysteries that from the harvest comes the seed of the new crop, life out of death. The notion of the World Egg is Greek, too, from the less familiar, "underground," but nonetheless influential, Orphic cosmogony.

But there are several aspects of the Halloween ritual that strike me as strictly post-nineteenth-century: one is the emphasis on gender (Mother as womb), into which the god is incorporated, becoming the seed of his own rebirth; then the gates are opened and the dead walk. The ancients knew about gender, too, but they didn't dwell on it. In the story of Demeter and Persephone, other aspects of the myth, such as renewal of life and reuniting of mother and daughter, mattered even more to them.

In fact, if we read the ancient Greek text that describes the foundation of Demeter's cult at Eleusis, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, what seems to matter most is a mother's poignant search for her lost child and her inability to find a replacement for her. The ending of the story is not entirely happy from either the mother or the daughter's point of view, because the daughter is restored to her mother only for a portion of every year. For the daughter, Persephone, marriage is literally a kind of death, because her father compels her to marry his brother Hades and to dwell in the Lower World.

Although the details of the mysteries (as the name suggests) were kept secret, it was this version of the myth that was celebrated in the ritual of the Eleusinian Mysteries. In addition, we know that the priest announced that a sacred boy child had been born and that at the end of the ceremony he held up a stalk of wheat. As the dead plant is the seed of the new crop, so the story of Persephone's descent and rebirth offers every mortal hope for a life after death, if only in a better, and happier, area of the Lower World. It is only in the writings of Church fathers who sought to discredit the mysteries, that we find reference to an enactment of a sacred marriage.

But modern interpretations of the Demeter myth consistently focus on gender definition. Even in 1902, Margaret Sherwood, a professor of English at Wellesley, saw the myth as an allegory of the lives of young females who left the nurturing atmosphere of the college in order to marry. The god of Death takes the form of a handsome young male, with sad, beautiful eyes, who gently and considerately takes Demeter's daughter away to the world of the dead. In the ancient *Homeric Hymn*, Demeter wears black clothes, refuses to eat because of the loss of her child, and withholds the crops so that humans starve and the gods receive no honor. In Miss Sherwood's poem, Demeter, who is portrayed as learned and detached, expatiates calmly and poetically upon her loss in blank verse, until some rustics appear and report that her daughter has been restored to her, at least for part of the year.

In Miss Sherwood's poem, Demeter stands aside with professorial dignity and wishes

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that Persephone had been unable to accept the handsome young man's kind invitation. In present-day accounts, the men that women love are themselves the enemy, and with them human history and, to some degree, traditional scholarship and book learning. In the current Goddess-cult literature, the story of Demeter and Persephone becomes an allegory about how patriarchal culture and "male" values replace female values of caring and nurturing. For example, in *The Goddess Letters: The Myth of Demeter and Persephone Retold* (1987) by Carol Orlock, Demeter is the Great Mother who watches her shrines being brutally destroyed by patriarchal religion, first Greek, then Christian. She is the goddess of all growing things, the natural life on earth. She has no permanent male partner. Her knowledge is instinctive, natural, evolving; writing, history, and laws are male inventions. It is her daughter Persephone who, through her marriage, allows herself to be dominated by male values and subservient to her husband. She cannot decide what to do about her mother's explanation of the world; in the end she leaves the decision to her husband.

In this version of the story, it is of course wrong for Persephone to allow her husband (rather than her mother) to make the final decision. As Gloria Orenstein, in her new book *The Reflowering of the Goddess*, observes:

> How many women in our time, raised on powerful Mother knowledge, and believing in it, have compromised themselves in favor of their Lord, have abdicated their courage, collaborated and conspired not with the "enemy" [here described as scholars and priests] but with the particular men that they love, whom they honor, and according to their whim, may destroy the fruits of their wives' creative and intellectual labors.

According to these present-day interpretations, the myth of Demeter and Persephone makes a political statement about the status of women and the potential loss to society that results from their subservience to men. Most writers insist that the enemy is not so much individual men as patriarchy, with its characteristic institutions, such as the family. Not that the New Goddess Religion is specifically opposed to the family; rather, because it regards the family as a secondary development, and an invention of patriarchal culture, it is not concerned with maintaining it. New Goddess rituals celebrate none of the characteristic stages in family life—for example, marriage, baptism, and confirmation. Instead they address the needs of individual, autonomous, and even isolated adults, men as well as women. As in the Halloween ritual, women are now encouraged to reach out and touch one another; to feel, to become one with the earth; to have temporary male partners.

In these accounts there is an implicit assumption that females are best off in the company of other females. In the ancient Greek *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, when Hades rises up out of the Earth to carry her away, Persephone was away from her mother gathering flowers, in the company of twenty-three other young females; many of them are Ocean Nymphs, but the powerful goddesses Athena and Artemis were also present. When established as Hades' bride in the Lower World, Persephone is miserable because she misses her mother. But the myth, even in its ancient form, can be understood to offer some limited hope to women living under patriarchy, since for part of each year at least, Persephone returns to stay with her mother.

Even though few other ancient myths describe the ties of mother and daughter so vividly, the mythology of the New Goddess gives prominence to accounts of the activities and life of collectives of women. According to "Z" (Zsuzsanna Budapest, originator of Feminist Spirituality), in *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (1989), in "the True Beginning, before the Judeo-Christian Genesis," the Goddess manifested herself not only as Earth or Demeter but also as Artemis or Diana to the groups of maidens who served her. These young women apparently lived in Dianic colleges, "according to the spiritual principles of Artemis, serving in Her shrines and blessing the sick." "Z" assures us (though without citing any ancient text) that the number of women in any Dianic college never exceeded fifty. The Dianics were either celibate or lesbian and kept apart from men so long as they remained in the college, though they could return to the larger community when they wished. But in the early period, mating occurred outside the context of marriage, and children were not paired off with their biological fathers.

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As I have tried to suggest, in these recent reconstructions of ritual and myth, references to ancient literature and practices directly address present-day concerns. So neatly does the religion fit what many women would like to believe about the past that it seems reasonable to ask whether these modern accounts of Goddess worship can be strictly historical. What was the Goddess really like? Was she ever worshiped in the form or forms that are now ascribed to her? Was she ever in charge of the pantheon of gods? I cannot speak with authority about the history of all the religions described by Gimbutas and the others, but in the ones I know something about, the answer is surely *no*.

In historical Greece and Rome, there were many goddesses who coexisted alongside one another, but they considered themselves to be separate individuals. When, in Euripides' drama, Hippolytus thought he would devote himself exclusively to the worship of Artemis and neglected the cult of Aphrodite, Aphrodite brought about his death. Aphrodite would hardly have relented if he had tried to claim that she was really Artemis in disguise; but he would never have imagined that Artemis and Aphrodite could be considered merely as aspects of a unitary goddess. Nor can we point to a time in which any goddesses were *in charge*. If, according to the best-known Greek account of Creation, Earth came into existence before the male god Heaven, it is because it is natural to imagine that a mother came first. Even though they were powerful and influential, Greek goddesses always existed in a world that was controlled by male gods.

It is only in Hellenistic Judaism that the notion of a unitary goddess begins to develop. In Proverbs 8:22–31, God's Wisdom is his first creation and stays beside him as his companion in the creation of the world; in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon (ca. 100 B.C.E.), God sends Wisdom to earth to rescue mankind; she led the Jews from Egypt (10: 18–19). In the theology of the contemporary religious movement known as Gnosticism, Wisdom (Sophia) in various guises continues to play a significant redemptive role for mankind. Although she is always subordinate to God the father, without her no soul can obtain true knowledge and salvation.

Sometimes in Gnostic texts, Wisdom (Sophia) is united with God in an androgynous dyad, or forms the third element in a trinity with father and son. In the tractate known as *The Thunder, the Perfect Mind,* the female speaker reveals that she can be identified in many seemingly contradictory forms and names; among many other things, she is the "one whose image is great in Egypt." Presumably the author of this tractate meant to suggest that Wisdom could at times be identified with the Egyptian goddess Isis.

Devotees of the cult of Isis in the second century C.E. themselves claimed that all the other goddesses were simply versions of herself under different names: in a dream, she tells the hero of Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* that one might call her Ceres (or Demeter) at Eleusis near Athens, or Venus/Aphrodite at Paphos in Cyprus, or Diana/Artemis at Ephesus, or Proserpina/Persephone in Sicily. A document from Egypt, written in Greek, roughly contemporary with Apuleius, gives a long list (in apparently random order) of all the goddess names (Aphrodite and Hera predominate) she was called by in different places; it addresses her as holy, mightiest, undefiled; it credits her with giving power to women equal to that of men and makes her responsible for the creation of the world:

> To all you give ordinances and a perfect year . . . in every place you showed that all men might know that heaven was established by you.

Another Egyptian hymn attributes to Isis the benefits that in traditional myth were bestowed on mankind by Prometheus; in particular, it is she who has power over the flooding and receding of the Nile. But it is impossible to know just how many people believed that Isis was the one universal goddess, especially outside of Egypt, since we do not know how many worshipers of Isis were prepared to worship her *exclusively*. Ordinarily pagans preferred to be initiated simultaneously into the mystery cults of several different goddesses, so it is not likely that all of her worshipers automatically identified her with the other goddesses they worshiped.

But the notion of a powerful independent goddess could not easily be accommodated with the fundamental notions of divinity in Judaism, Gnosticism, and Christianity in the early centuries C.E. The ancient Hebrew ten-

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dency to connect a woman's potential for doing evil with her sexuality, which derives from the story of Eve in Genesis, surfaces also in Gnostic religious allegory. The soul (like Wisdom, an abstract noun of feminine gender), although born a virgin, prostituted herself, but is saved by her brother, the Heavenly bridegroom. She is reunited with him in a marriage that restores the damage done when the woman led the man astray at the Creation, and also brings about her own rebirth, ascent, and return to her home with her father and brother. It is instructive to compare the wanton and uncontrolled Soul of the Gnostic tractate with the narrative of Cupid and Psyche (Soul) in *The Golden Ass*: the pagan writer Apuleius concentrates more on his heroine's state of mind than her body, and, like the heroines of ancient Greek novels, Psyche remains steadfastly faithful to her bridegroom until they can be reunited.

In canonical Christianity, the powers of the Gnostic Wisdom were given to Jesus himself; Paul proclaims Jesus as the Wisdom (Sophia) of God (1 Cor. 1:24). In the New Testament Gospels, significant female roles were given not to the quasi-Platonic Gnostic abstractions such as Wisdom or Soul but to the female figures directly associated with Jesus: the three (or four) Marys: Jesus's mother, the Magdalene, and the wife of Clopas (who may be the same person as the mother of James and Joses or Joseph). In the Gospel of John, these three women are present at Jesus's crucifixion. In the Gospels of Mark and John, it is Mary Magdalene, rather than his mother, to whom Jesus first appears after having risen from the dead. Jesus's mother, Mary, along with a group of women, is among the first brotherhood *(sic)* that gathered to hear Peter on the Mount of Olives after Jesus's ascent to Heaven (Acts 1: 14–15).

Even though the Marys are present at these critical times, they do not play an important role in the formation of the new Church or in the dissemination of its doctrines. They are accorded recognition more for their service and piety than for their teaching or performing miracles. In the Gnostic tractate *Gospel of Philip*, Jesus appears to be enacting the allegorical role of the heavenly bridegroom with Mary Magdalene. In the fourth and fifth centuries, Jesus's mother Mary is herself a miracle: "virgin whose womb brought salvation, mother who had no knowledge of a man." In the fourth century C.E., St. Augustine addresses Jesus's mother Mary as the nursing mother of all mankind and asks her to give milk not only to her son but to the pious. He praises her for having canceled out the damage done by Eve: "Sin came into the world through a woman, but it was eliminated by a woman." In Sedulius's Easter hymn (ca. 450), she is praised as the "holy Mother who brought forth the king who rules heaven and earth for eternity." She is the "unquenchable light of virginity," but not the light of the world.

Where then did the notion of a powerful, unitary goddess come from? Not from Greco-Roman or other European varieties of paganism, which had many goddesses. Not from Judaism, which has no independent goddess, but rather a philosophical abstraction dependent on God. Not from the cult of Isis, which never seems to have had the universality that its adherents claimed for it. Not from Christianity, whose central female figure is without sexuality, and whose power, such as it is, derives from her son. The New Goddess, unitary, universal, and powerful, is a modern creation, the female counterpart of, although totally independent from, the Judeo-Christian God. Now, instead of one god, there is the Goddess. Instead of the son, there is her daughter; instead of being like the Virgin Mary, the New Goddess is a mother who rejoices in her sexuality.

The New Goddess Religion, for all its ancient nomenclature, does not retain the structure of the polytheistic pagan religions of the past but rather presents a female version of the structure of Christianity, except that the Holy Spirit seems simply to have disappeared. As such, it retains and even imposes on the past some resolutely Christian values: what would Shakespeare's weird sisters have thought of the modern witches who insist that witchcraft can only be used for good?

Monotheistic notions are so pervasive in European culture that they appear to have made it hard to describe the development of religious thought in any other terms. In Jungian psychology, individual goddesses are merely faces or aspects of a central Goddess figure. The Great Mother is an archetype, or, as Erich Neumann put it, "an image at work in the human psyche" that might manifest itself

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in different ways at different times, but that nonetheless derives from the universal experience of mankind. Accordingly, descriptions of the archetype are based on the assumption that similarities are more important than differences, whether in space or in time.

Robert Graves's unique confection, *The White Goddess,* is a characteristic product of such a universalizing process, even though it is not explicitly Jungian, but perhaps influenced by the notion of archetypes under the influence of the Zeitgeist. Graves offered his White Goddess as an antidote to mid-twentieth-century Christianity and Communism. His "discovery" of the White Goddess is based on an intuitive methodology that, although learned and ingenious, resolutely ignores contradictory evidence, and, when inconvenient, the effects of chronology and geography. The Goddess is *white* because Io in the myth was turned into a white heifer; she has three aspects (the Io "trinity") because Hecate has three faces.

By substituting assertion for proof and possibility for probability, and taking similarity to mean identity, all the many different goddesses of ancient Europe become reflections of one another: after quoting Lucius's prayer to Isis in *The Golden Ass,* Graves asserts that "much the same prayer is found in Latin in a twelfth-century English herbal," without discussing possible influence or significant differences. Graves avoids complex explanations by referring to texts without actually citing them: "If you read Apollonius recently you would recall that [the Goddess Libya] appeared in triad by Lake Triton to Jason wearing goatskins." Apollonius himself mentions only three heroines of Libya, helpers, who came to the aid first of the infant Athena, and now to Jason and his men.

In constructing their own versions of ancient Goddess religion, the proponents of the new cults adopt the eclectic methodologies of the Jungians and of Graves. But for all the influence, direct or indirect, of the Great Mother and the White Goddess, the new cults explicitly do not replicate the traditional roles assigned to females in the Jungian Goddess archetype. Instead, they have created a religion that is particularly suited to the needs and problems of those twentieth-century women who seek to do away with—or do without—traditional family structure, such as (but by no means exclusively) avowed feminists, divorced mothers, and single women. It is not surprising that the Goddess archetype has gained considerable strength in an era when one-half of all marriages end in divorce and many women must raise children and support themselves or their families without the assistance of men. Part of the archetype's appeal derives from its ability not simply to confront, but also to celebrate, ambiguities that traditional religion has not coped with successfully, such as the powerlessness of the individual and the dominance of male over female, or the preeminence of word over emotion. Goddess religion offers instead the power of the powerless, the maleness within femaleness, and wisdom in emotion. As the anthropologist T. N. Luhrmann has suggested in her recent book *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft,* Goddess religion is a modernist, deconstructive religion that intentionally challenges authority.

I now understand better an instance in a book I was asked to review several years ago about lesbian nuns who had left the Church: one, who had renamed herself Sequoia, found that Goddess religion spoke to her emotional needs much more effectively than traditional Catholicism: "When we raise a cone of power and feel our collective energies spiralling upward I want us to feel very earthy." But aside from allowing her to use her own physicality simultaneously to express her oneness with the earth and to project masculine power, at least for the duration of the ritual, what other advantages can this religion give her, or its other adherents? Did Dianic Colleges have libraries and laboratories? At least traditional Christianity, whatever its other drawbacks, preserved literature and culture through many centuries of human barbarity and brutality. What educational values will Goddess religion preserve?

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